



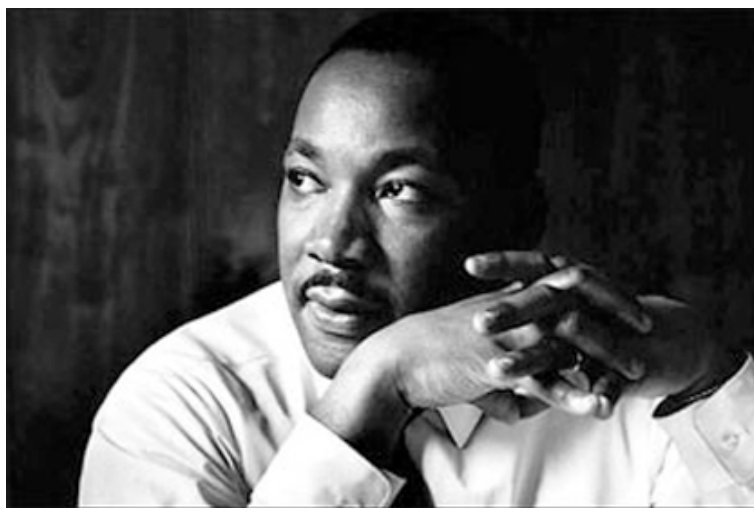
# *President Shirley's Statement on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Day*

*January 19, 2009*

One year ago on this day, few could have imagined that the heir to Dr. Martin Luther King's dream would be a man who will be inaugurated as our 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on Tuesday.

Now and forever, we will never be able to separate the two, and that is as it should be. As a country, we join together on the third Monday in January to remember the remarkable life of Dr. King.

In another three weeks, we will honor in a more special way than usual another man who dedicated a presidency to prevent the union of the United States from being violently torn apart, who risked a legacy by unchaining thousands of black people from servitude, and who, like Dr. King, was killed for trying to make the world better for others.



***The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

Each man in his own time had no way to know where the actions of his convictions would lead. They could only believe it would be a better place far into the unfathomable future.

Those of us alive today are miraculously blessed to see that future manifest, to experience the very moment that has been brought into being from a mere whisper of a prayer. The thought, the wish, and the actions of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century white man and a 20<sup>th</sup> Century black man emerged into thunderous movements yet remained separated within their own centuries.

That separation will at last close on Tuesday when President-elect Barack Obama takes his oath of office. To no one's surprise, the new president will invoke the words and memories of President Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., each whom was the conscience of his age, the conscience of American history, and without whom we may never have seen this day.

At a crucial time, President Lincoln had to take the country into war to save it from tearing itself apart. One hundred years later, Dr. King used reason, persuasion and influence hoping to bring the country out of a war that was again dividing families and dividing countrymen. Both times witnessed the terrible cost in blood, treasure and burned American cities.

James M. Washington, editor of "*A Testament of Hope*," wrote that Dr. King "dared to dream of a better day in the midst of the nightmare that surrounded him. He dared to believe and sacrificed his life for a future that some believe we are beginning to occupy."

America finds herself again at a time when her people, her institutions and her future are shaken by doubt, insecurity and fear. With the recent election, it falls to President-elect Obama to complete America's unfinished struggle. It falls to him to guide the country as it feels its way down the darkened corridor of history through a new period of war, distrust, and misgivings, and as voices shout all around.

"Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy," Dr. King said at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood."

Today is the day Dr. King spoke of 45 years ago. Had he lived, he would have been 80 years old on January 15. We are left to appreciate the passion of his words and admire the moral commitment he demonstrated.

Our Navajo elders long ago understood that there are no impossibilities in life, and we are about to enter another period in history when we see that. Our elders teach us that for peace and happiness to thrive, the people need to live in harmony and beauty. Even today, all of our prayers, and all of our aspirations for ourselves, our families, and our people have this at its center.

It is our prayer that America will be reshaped once again through hope. On this Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, I ask that our thoughts for our families, our Navajo Nation, and our country be good thoughts. The same bright day Dr. King spoke of awaits us all.

DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT  
**THE NAVAJO NATION**